

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 785

CS 214 795

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TITLE Using Thematic Units with Elementary and Secondary Students.  
PUB DATE [95]  
NOTE 8p  
PUB TYPE Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131)  
  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Annotated Bibliographies; Class Activities; Elementary School Students; Elementary Secondary Education; \*Reading Material Selection; Secondary School Students; Special Needs Students; \*Thematic Approach; Whole Language Approach  
IDENTIFIERS Content Area Teaching; ERIC

## ABSTRACT

Noting that whole language proponents suggest integration of two or more subject areas around a common theme using literature, this paper presents annotations of 31 items from the ERIC database on thematic units of study. Annotations in the paper are organized into six sections--overview, elementary examples, research, secondary examples, special learners, and other related examples. The paper includes annotations of ERIC documents and journal articles published between 1986 and 1991. (RS)

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# Using Thematic Units with Elementary and Secondary Students

by Jerry Johns and Cindy L. Olsen

Traditionally, the content areas such as math and science were taught as separate entities. Recently, whole language proponents have suggested integration of two or more subject areas around a common theme using literature. This is known as a thematic approach. Using thematic units of study teaches students of all age and ability levels that learning is meaningful and relevant to everyday life.

This Bibliography considers six areas related to thematic units: (1) overview, (2) elementary examples, (3) research, (4) secondary examples, (5) special learners, and (6) other related examples.

The citations are from the period 1986-1992 and are of two types: ERIC documents and journal articles.

## Overview

AN: ED346499

AU: Montgomery, Paula Kay

TI: Approaches to Literature Through Theme. The Oryx Reading Motivation Series No. 1.

PY: 1992

AB: Provides literature theme approaches and teaching strategies for reading and teaching literature.

AV: Oryx Press, 4041 North Central at Indian School Road, Phoenix, AZ 85012 (\$29.50).

AN: ED336730

AU: Clemmons, Joan; And Others

TI: Engaging the Learner in Whole Language: An Immersion Approach.

PY: 1991; Workshop presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (36th, Las Vegas, NV, May 6-10, 1991).

AB: Describes a collection of administrative planning and teaching materials focusing on an immersion approach to engaging learners in whole literacy.

AN: ED325840

AU: Henney, Maribeth

TI: Literature-Based Theme Units.

PY: 1990; Paper presented at the World Congress on Reading (13th, Stockholm, Sweden, July 3-6, 1990).

AB: Suggests that literature-based units are a way to immerse children in reading and enable them to use this reading in interesting, meaningful, relevant activities.

AN: ED315775

AU: Pappas, Christina C.; And Others

TI: An Integrated Language Perspective in the Elementary School: Theory Into Action

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of RI position or policy.

PY: 1990

AB: Outlines the integrated language perspective on teaching in the elementary school. Provides the theory on which the perspective is based and many examples of how to translate it into practice.

AV: Order Dept., Addison-Wesley-Longman, Jacob Way, Reading, MA 01867 (\$29.95).

### Elementary Examples

AN: EJ448341

AU: Drum, Yvonne

TI: King Tut Revisited.

PY: 1992

JN: *Ohio Reading Teacher*; v26 n4 p25-28 Sum 1992

AB: Describes an instructional unit on ancient Egypt that incorporates many content areas.

AN: ED340012

AU: Hoberg, Rosemary; Plante, Donna

TI: Learning About Frogs: An Integrated Curricular Unit.

PY: 1992

JN: *Insights into Open Education*; v24 n 5 Jan-Feb 1992

AB: Describes an integrated curricular unit on frogs, developed for the second grade, that focuses primarily on integrating reading, writing, and science.

AB: ED355469

AU: Raines, Shirley C.; Canady, Robert J.

TI: Story stretchers for the Primary Grades: Activities to Expand Children's Favorite Books.

PY: 1992

AB: Describes a literature-inspired curriculum for grades 1-3 organized around thematic units. Uses the concept of story stretchers to connect children's books to other subject areas.

AV: Gryphon House, Inc., 3706 Otis St., Mt. Rainier, MD 20712 (\$14.95 plus \$2.50 postage/handling).

AN: EJ438575

AU: Zaidel, Lisa Brusman

TI: The Theme's The Thing.

PY: 1991

JN: *Learning*; v20 n3 p60-63 Oct 1991

AB: Presents suggestions to help elementary teachers organize learning centers and activities around three themes, for grades 1, 3, and 5, in several content areas.

AN: ED314718

AU: Hewitt, Amelia M.; Roos, Marie C.

TI: Thematic-Based Literature throughout the Curriculum.

PY: 1990

AB: Describes practical activities for incorporating children's literature and thematic activities in the curriculum to stimulate children's thinking and language.

AN: ED328366

AU: Leigh, Cindy; And Others

TI: Primary Guide for Instructional Planning.

PY: 1990

AB: Describes Mississippi's guide for instructional planning for the primary grades. Includes six units, research principles incorporated, recommended books, and teacher resources.

AN: EJ410151

AU: Smit, Edna K.

TI: Teaching Theme to Elementary Students (In the Classroom).

PY: 1990

JN: *The Reading Teacher*; v43 n9 p699-701 May 1990

AB: Shares two methods for teaching themes (giving and jealousy are used as examples) to elementary students.

AN: ED316867

AU: Vivian, Diane M.

TI: A Thematic Literary Unit: Using Literature Across The Curriculum in a Elementary Classroom.

PY: 1990

JN: *Insights into Open Education*; v22 n7 April 1988

AB: Describes "Think Big," a thematic literary unit using literature about elephants in a holistic way and attempting to cross the curriculum into the content areas of science and math.

AN: ED298479

AU: Whyte, Sarah

TI: Whole Language Using Big Books.

PY: 1988

AB: Demonstrates using Wright Company Big Books in thematic units in a first grade program.

## Research

AN: ED349540

AU: Erwin, Barbara

TI: The Effect of Culturally Related Schemata and Instruction Using Thematic Units on Comprehension.

PY: 1992; Paper presented at the World Congress on Reading (14th, Maui, HI, July 13-16, 1992)

AB: Describes a study addressing the relationship of culturally related schema to comprehension and examines the effect of instruction using thematic units upon the

development of background knowledge. Results indicate that the use of thematic units as a method for improving comprehension was a viable strategy within certain parameters.

AN: ED348645

AU: King, Caryn M.

TI: Creating a Literate Environment for Learning Social Studies Content.

PY: 1992; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (37th, Orlando, FL, May 3-8, 1992).

AB: Describes a study that examined the extent to which literacy tasks were emphasized within a fourth-grade social studies classroom. Findings suggest that language was viewed as an integral part of the learning process in this classroom.

AN: ED340042

AU: Rosaen, Cheryl L.; Cantlon, Danise J.

TI: Coherence in Literature-Based Thematic Units. Elementary Subjects Center Series No. 53.

PY: 1991

AB: Describes a study conducted to analyze and compare two elementary literature-based thematic curricular units. Results indicated that teachers need to choose resources for literature-based units well and consider seriously the power of the theme for developing literary understanding and appreciation.

### Secondary Examples

AN: ED339066

AU: Ballan, Francine; And Others

TI: Multicultural Communication Arts, Grades 7 & 8.

PY: 1991

AB: Describes a seventh- and eighth-grade unit designed to challenge students to think critically and to motivate them to relate their own personal experiences to a broader panorama of society. Contains specific goals of the units.

AV: Instructional Publications Unit, New York City Public Schools, 131 Livingston St., Brooklyn, NY 11201 (\$15.00).

AN: EJ428552

AU: Swicegood, Philip R.; Parsons, James L.

TI: The Thematic Unit Approach: Content and Process Instruction for Secondary Learning Disabled Students.

PY: 1991

JN: *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*; v6 n2 p112-16 1991

AB: Describes the thematic unit approach to content-area learning and its use for learning-disabled students. Provides guidelines for developing and evaluating thematic units.

- AN: EJ405085  
 AU: Davis, Susan J.  
 TI: Breaking the Cycle of Failure Through the Thematic Experience Approach.  
 PY: 1990  
 JN: *Journal of Reading*; v33 n6 p420-23 Mar 1990  
 AB: Describes the Thematic Experience Approach, designed to build on positive experiences that enlarge the high school dropout's perspective while building self-esteem, background knowledge, and reading ability. Contains a sample unit dealing with legal rights.
- AN: ED327859  
 AU: Stover, Lois T.  
 TI: Using Young Adult Literature as Artifact to Gain Insight about the Adolescent Experience in Other Cultures.  
 PY: 1990  
 AB: Describes how using young adult literature from other countries in the classroom provides a common ground from which to build the tolerance and appreciation of cultural diversity in today's world. Suggests common themes of adolescence and 35 applicable books.
- AN: EJ388541  
 AU: Cooter, Robert B., Jr.; Griffith, Robert  
 TI: Thematic Units for Middle School: An Honorable Seduction.  
 PY: 1989  
 JN: *Journal of Reading*; v32 n8 p676-81 May 1989  
 AB: Describes the Dublin model, a program which uses thematic units or individualized reading assignments to focus on popular adolescent literature and includes projects that demonstrate students' comprehension of text. Discusses the formulation, implementation, and assessment of this program.
- AN: EJ432386  
 AU: Mitsch, Bernadette Volpe  
 TI: Reading + Writing = Drama: Integrating Reading/Writing in a Thematic Unit.  
 PY: 1989  
 JN: *Ohio Reading Teacher*; v24 n1 43-46 Fall 1989  
 AB: Describes a collaborative project between instructors in language arts and social studies at the middle school level that produced a joint educational venture that made reading and writing more meaningful, challenging, and exciting for students and teachers.
- AN: ED292349  
 TI: Spanish: Communication and Culture. Culturally Oriented Thematic Units in the Secondary Schools.  
 PY: 1986  
 AB: Describes a piloted curriculum guide for the junior and senior high levels in New York City's Spanish second language programs. Includes six units for Spanish levels 1-3.  
 AV: New York City Board of Education, Curriculum Editorial and Production Unit, Office



of Curriculum Development and Support, Room 613, 131 Livingston Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201.

### Special Learners

AN: EJ450005

AU: Wiig, Elisabeth K.; And Others

TI: Developing Words and Concepts in the Classroom: A Holistic-Thematic Approach.

PY: 1992

JN: *Intervention in School and Clinic*; v27 n5 p278-85 May 1992

AB: Describes the use of cognitive-linguistic training models and thematic units with adolescents with language-learning disabilities. Semantic categorization and concept formation models were used as the bases of the intervention.

AN: EJ400690

AU: Bolte, Anne L.

TI: Using Themes as the Building Blocks for Learning.

PY: 1989

JN: *Perspectives for Teachers of the Hearing Impaired*; v8 n1 p21-23 Sep-Oct 1989

AB: Outlines the advantages of using themes as the foundation of a language arts program for hearing-impaired students. Includes methods for developing new themes, recycling old themes, having children choose their study materials, and structuring classroom activities as well as a description of an insect theme.

AN: EJ368958

AU: Miller, Eta

TI: A Plot to Teach Students to Recognize Theme.

PY: 1988

JN: *Perspectives for Teachers of the Hearing Impaired*; v6 n3 p2-4 Jan-Feb 1988

AB: Deaf elementary and secondary students were found to be less skilled when reading stories in "elaboration," a process requiring higher-order thinking skills. An approach to teaching these skills is described that compares and contrasts a series of stories sharing a common theme.

### Other Related Examples

AN: ED34640

AU: Sandel, Lenore

TI: Exploring the Solar System: A Literature Unit within a Whole Language Context.

PY: 1992

AB: Describes in detail the process of creating a unit on the solar system. Suggests that the literature unit is a useful framework for literature-based instruction which provides a total resource for content area teaching.

AN: EJ422734  
AU: Goldbort, Robert C.  
TI: Science in Literature: Materials for a Thematic Teaching Approach.  
PY: 1991  
JN: *English Journal*; v80 n3 p69-73 Mar 1991  
AB: Suggests that one way for English teachers to have students explore relationships between literature and science is to have them read and write about fiction with scientific themes. Outlines units that create chances for students to bring together the literary arts and the sciences into one classroom.

AN: ED338478  
TI: Wet and Wild Water.  
PY: 1990  
AB: Describes the uses of the thematic approach to show the integration of subjects and skills to create a context for learning. Describes six aquatic units.

AN: ED333368  
AU: Chao, Han Hua; Smith, Carl, Comp.  
TI: Expanding Thematic Units beyond the Textbook. Learning Package No. 2.  
PY: 1990  
AB: Describes a learning package originally designed for the Department of Defense Schools (D8DDS) system for use with teachers who wish to upgrade or expand their teaching skills.

AN: EJ381852  
AU: Simmons, John S.  
TI: Thematic Units: A Context for Journal Writing.  
PY: 1989  
JN: *English Journal*; v78 n1 p70-72 Jan 1989  
AB: Argues that thematic units may be the best way to avoid the lack of compelling journal writing topics. Argues that themes introduced in a journal writing assignment prior to the study of the text are good preparation for reading. Presents some examples of theme, topics, and accompanying literary works.